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**THE HEROIC AGE  
OF  
CONGREGATIONALISM**

**. B. NIGHTINGALE, M.A., Litt.D.**



THE HEROIC AGE  
OF CONGREGATIONALISM

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# THE HEROIC AGE OF CONGREGATIONALISM

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BY THE

REV. B. NIGHTINGALE, M.A., LITT.D.

LONDON:

CONGREGATIONAL UNION OF ENGLAND AND WALES, INC.

MEMORIAL HALL, E.C.4

THIS LITTLE BOOK  
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO  
EPHRAIM HINDLE, ESQ., J.P.  
OF BLACKBURN

who, even after the lapse of long years, is still gratefully remembered as an employer of labour in the village of my birth, and with whom it has been my great privilege to be intimately associated for many years in service, more particularly in Lancashire, for the Congregationalism, which he loves so well, and for which he has done so much



## PREFACE

THE recent Centenary of the Church Aid and Home Missionary Society is, in part, responsible for the publication of this work. The approach of that interesting event led me to turn again to that period in our religious history which, for many years, has had considerable fascination for me ; and it seemed to me that something along the line of what is here given might be useful. The story is full of encouragement, because it shows how the depressions of any particular period are never such as to more than temporarily prevent the progress of the Divine Kingdom. Moreover, only good can issue from being brought face to face with those devoted Itinerant preachers, to whom the Christian ministry was always a venture of faith, and who seemed prepared to risk everything in the pursuit of their mission. I am not aware that any previous attempt has been made to tell the story as it is here given. A certain amount of space is, of course, always devoted to it in religious histories ; but I have long felt that it is so supremely important as to deserve a place to itself, and the book is sent forth in the hope that it will be helpful to all who are trying to win for Christ, not England only, but also the world.

For the loan of a volume of the early Reports of the

Home Missionary Society, of which I have made considerable use, I gratefully acknowledge the kindness of the Rev. J. E. Flower, M.A., who, after many years of faithful service, has just retired from the Secretaryship of the Church Aid and Home Missionary Society.

If amidst the changes which the new times are bringing for Congregationalism, as for much else in our national life, we can keep the old spirit of courageous faith, unselfish service and sacrificial life, we may go into the future assured of achievements greater and more wonderful than anything the past has to show.

B. NIGHTINGALE

MILTONA  
RILEY AVENUE  
ST ANNES-ON-SEA  
*May 1921*

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## CHAPTER I

### THE GREAT REVIVAL

THE Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century was one of the most remarkable movements that have ever appeared in this country. The story has never yet been adequately told ; certainly it has not been sufficiently read and studied by Nonconformists, and particularly by Congregationalists, who are so directly concerned with it. Yet is it pre-eminently the story for these days, when it is so easy to become pessimistic in relation to religion, and when everywhere the underlying feeling would appear to be that Christianity has reached its commonplace stage and nothing great, daring, mighty may be expected from it. The fact, however, made clear by the story is that any moment, when the need arises, the power Divine may appear in "signs and wonders," moral marvels and spiritual miracles. The Evangelical Revival arrested the process of decay in religion, which for some time had been developing so swiftly and threateningly, that it seemed as if nothing could save it from dying completely out of the land. Never before had religion been at so low an ebb ; never has it been so since. It is not possible to exaggerate the seeming hopelessness of the situation ; and it was not merely one section of the Christian Church or one locality that suffered ; the spiritual paralysis was so general and so complete that infidel writers openly boasted that the time had come

to dig the grave for the Christian faith. Voltaire, who all his life was in close touch with men and movements in this country, predicted that, before the close of the century, Christianity and all its belongings would be among the forgotten things of a past age. How false and foolish these predictions were the Revival soon made clear. With it came a mighty quickening everywhere. The results which followed completely baffle description; the story reads like a thrilling romance. "In many respects," writes one, "the movement corresponds to the Quaker movement of a century before. In the vastness of its sweep; in the audaciousness of its faith; in the courage and endurance of its promoters; in the hostility which it excited, not only among people outside the Churches but still more among people within, and in the conversions which it effected, it even more than paralleled that earlier movement." On village greens, from market crosses, in churchyards, in open fields, on hillsides, in market squares, at race courses, at the corners of streets, in places of worship when they could command them, anywhere and everywhere the great Evangelists, Whitefield and Wesley, preached a long lost Gospel of redeeming love for a fallen world, with the most marvellous effect. In his *Popular History of the Free Churches*, Mr Silvester Horne says that "these revival services were the scenes of an indescribable tumult of emotions—the awful anguish of conscience-stricken souls and the equally intense rapture of faith in a pardoning love. Men and women rocked to and fro in agony of contrition and fear, and not seldom fell groaning to the ground overwhelmed with shame and despair. Then the message of peace started new faith and hope in their souls, and their ecstasy of joy was



as frantic as the ecstasy of their sorrow had been. Sometimes it is certain the weaker sort of men and women were driven clean out of their senses with alarm as the present and future condition of the soul was depicted by the unsparing eloquence of the preacher. Often the audiences that had come to scoff listened to Whitefield or Wesley with white faces and uncontrollable sobbings, while hardened hypocrites and callous men of the world cried out, 'What shall I do to be saved?' Those whose set purpose was to interrupt would begin with 'big swelling words,' but 'immediately after, the hammer of the Word brake the rocks in pieces.'" I have given that passage in full because, I think, in these days of unemotional religion, it will do us good to come face to face with those strange happenings, in one of the mightiest religious upheavals that this country has ever witnessed. It is easy, of course, to be critical and to attempt to dismiss all this by saying that it was simply "emotionalism." But it cannot be so dismissed. Even if it be admitted that the emotional entered largely into it, what of it? It was a real achievement to make any impression at all, and certainly an impression so vast and tremendous, upon a cold, stolid, apathetic, lifeless society, such as the England of that day had become. But why depreciate emotion, especially in religion? The truth is that religion without emotion is of little value; it lacks dynamic; we shall have to get back for it some of that warm, passionate feeling, which is such a prominent element in the story of every great religious revival, and especially in that of the Evangelical Revival, before it will be the living, attractive, achieving power among us that it was meant to be. The theology of the move-

ment, also, may excite the criticism of some ; but again, why so ? It is not in the least necessary to make it our theology in order to see in the movement what is of unspeakable value. This habit of hurling criticisms at the theology of the great religious leaders of a past age, which some have so diligently cultivated, is really so much waste time and energy, and reflects mainly upon the critics themselves. For it shows an entire lack of appreciation of the real position of things. The correct attitude to assume towards them is not that which seeks to discover what they failed to become and do in the light of our own age, but what they succeeded in becoming, quite colossal in comparison with others around them, and the magnificence of their achievements with their equipment and for their time. If we believe in the great word of John Robinson, that " the Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Holy Word," theologically, as in other respects, it would be strange if we were still standing where Calvin and Luther, Baxter and Milton, Wesley and Whitefield did. These must be judged by their day ; and, if we are to take as evidence the character and life which their theology produced, it was good for their day, that for which indeed it called. Certainly in relation to the Evangelical Revival it was so. The awfulness of sin ; the sovereignty and power of God ; and the certainty of punishment for sin were the things upon which those great preachers everywhere insisted ; and they were the things which were required to shake a dull, sluggish, dead age into repentance and prayer, seriousness and life.

The years which followed the Revival may be called the afterglow ; and, in many respects, this was even more wonderful than the Revival itself. Few move-

ments have borne fruit so rich and plentiful, and, in all sorts of ways, we are still gathering and enjoying it, though often ignorant of the tree on which it has grown. The revived religious spirit made itself felt in every department of the national life. This is, of course, always the case. Religion cannot be kept in a watertight compartment; it affects the whole man into whom it enters, making him a new man; it touches the whole nation that has fallen under its influence, making it a new nation; and never was this seen to be more so than then. It is beyond all question that it was the Evangelical Revival which saved this country from the horrors of the French Revolution. Our national characteristics may be different from those of the French; it may be that we are less impulsive, more even tempered, more difficult to excite and move; that the habit of seeking our political changes in quiet, constitutional ways has so long been with us that it is difficult, indeed almost impossible, to break it; but that is not sufficient to account for the fact that during those fateful years, when the imperial throne of France was rolled in the dust and its occupant was guillotined, when the streets of Paris ran with blood and the worst passions of human nature went unchecked in their career of lust and murder, this country enjoyed comparative calm. For it needs to be remembered that the doctrines, which bore such terrible fruit in France, were not strange to this country; on the contrary, it has been stated on high authority that they were "the product to a very considerable extent of English ideas, borrowed by literary men like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu." It was the return of England to the things of religion which was its salvation in those perilous days.

Literature, also, was greatly influenced by the change, poetry, in particular, becoming more warm, living, and real. It would, indeed, be quite easy to show that social reform, commercial enterprise, colonial expansion, and general national progress felt the throb of a new life through the revival of religion in the nation.

But it was in the domain of religion itself that the richest fruit appeared. There was, for example, a disposition among the various religious bodies to seek fellowship with each other to a far greater degree than they had previously been known to do. The rigid denominational barriers, for which a dominant Church was largely responsible, showed some tendency to crumble away; and Anglican and Nonconformist ministers fraternized in a quite new and delightful way. The late Mr Silvester Horne, who was accustomed to make much of this point, both in his speeches and writings, used to say that the Reunion of Christendom was then almost in sight. Perhaps that statement was a little too sweeping, more rhetorical than exact; but the happy relations existing between many of the Clergy and Nonconformist ministers specially impress the student of those days. It was not that Congregationalism had ceased to care for its great distinctive principles. Dr Dale is, I think, at fault in the over emphasis which he puts upon the spread of, what he calls, the "undenominational spirit" in consequence of the Revival. What happened was not so much a weakening of attachment to the denominational spirit and position, on the part of Congregationalists, as a fuller recognition of that larger truth, that all Christian people are one in Christ, and a consequent eagerness to co-operate, wherever possible, in furthering the common interests of the Kingdom of God.

It is, however, the birth of a New Missionary Spirit of marvellous daring and power that is one of the main things, which arrests attention on reading the story of those days ; and to the consideration of this the next chapter will be devoted.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW MISSIONARY SPIRIT

NEVER, since the days of the Apostles, had so real and serious an attempt been made to carry out the last command of the Lord to His disciples, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature," as that which marked the closing years of the eighteenth century and the opening years of the nineteenth. Not that missionary enterprise was then a new thing. It is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Christianity that, when it is able to be its true self, it is aggressive and missionary. Inevitably so, because it is the one religion which claims the right to the faith, obedience and love of the whole human world. Hence, at various times, there have been efforts, on a more or less large scale, by different sections of the Church to extend the Christian faith, in the form perhaps which the Church so labouring represented. The story of the preaching Friars of Wycliffe's day and the Jesuit missionaries of later times makes extremely interesting reading, showing, as it does, what men are prepared to do and suffer for the faith that is in them. Nor can one forget how John Eliot went among the wild Indians of America, and so won their confidence and affection that his name is still treasured by such fragments of that ancient race as yet remain; nor how Hans Egede, the Apostle of Greenland, made his home in that land of eternal snow and ice, in order to bring



the Gospel to the lonely and benighted people there. The history, also, of Moravian Missions is one of the finest chapters in the story of missionary enterprise. To extend the Kingdom of Christ was part, too, of the scheme of the Pilgrim Fathers, when they left these shores for the new world across the Atlantic. "A great hope, and indeed zeal, they had," says one, "of laying some good foundation, or, at least, to make some way thereunto for the propagating and advancing the Gospel of the Kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the earth, yea, though they should be but as stepping stones unto others for performing of so great a work." In Cromwell's conception of "a Christian State and its functions" a "grand campaign of Foreign Missions" had an important place; and, though he had little or no opportunity to carry out his scheme in relation to Foreign Missions, much was done by Itinerant preachers to reach the heathen at home. It is, however, in the period named, that we get the great missionary age of the Christian Church. As never before in its history, the burden of the heathen world seems to have been laid upon the conscience and heart of the newly awakened Christian Church; and, in all sorts of ways, the New Missionary Spirit sought expression and endeavoured to carry out what it believed to be the will of the Divine Lord in the matter. All, or nearly all, the great Missionary Societies then came into being. The Baptists led the way in 1792; the London Missionary Society followed in 1795; the Church Missionary Society came next in 1799; and the Wesleyans, who had been at work for nearly thirty years in a somewhat irregular way, founded their Society in 1813. The Religious Tract Society began its career in 1799 and the Bible Society in 1804. These

two organizations are still among the most vigorous and useful agencies in religious circles, and they are to-day, as they have been from the hour of their birth, largely auxiliary missionary societies; it is to them that the various Missionary Societies look for some of the literature which their work requires.

This was the birth period also of many of the more important County Associations and County Unions in Congregationalism. The eighteenth century was pre-eminently individualistic, and religion felt the influence of this, as did everything else. Congregationalism was Independency, and often of a very rigid type; but it began to be borne in upon its leaders that something in the way of union was needed if it was to be effective. To repeat what is stated in the previous chapter, there was no disposition to sacrifice the distinctive principle of Congregationalism, the right of each Church to govern itself under the guidance and leadership of Christ; the principle which is its glory, which has been its power, and which surrendered and sacrificed Congregationalism will lose its right to be; but, while sacredly conserving this, it was felt that there should be a coming together of the various Churches in a county, or some other specific area, and a uniting of their forces for common service. So there came into being many of the Unions and Associations which remain until this day. The Bedfordshire Union was formed in 1797; Berks, South Oxon and South Bucks in 1798; North Bucks and North Oxon in 1818; Cheshire in 1806; Cornwall in 1802; Derbyshire in 1815; East Devon in 1817; North Devon in 1785; South Devon in 1786; West Dorset in 1795; Durham and Northumberland in 1822; Essex in 1798; Gloucester in 1811; Hampshire in 1781; Herts in 1810;

Kent in 1791 ; Lancashire in 1806 ; Norfolk in 1814 ; Northamptonshire in 1812 ; Shropshire in 1796 ; Somerset in 1796 ; Wilts and East Somerset in 1797. Some others are given in the *Congregational Year Book* as reformed at a comparatively late date, which originally may have belonged to the period in question. Perhaps nothing witnesses more distinctly to the presence and power of the New Missionary Spirit, which had taken possession of awakened English Christianity than the birth of the Home Missionary Society in 1819, which, as the Church Aid and Home Missionary Society, is still pursuing its useful work. More will be said about this later ; and perhaps sufficient has been advanced to show how tremendously alive and active this new spirit was.

It has already been pointed out that this New Missionary Spirit was one of the fruits of the Evangelical Revival. It is said by some that it was the circulation of the story of Captain Cook's voyages which gave rise to missionary enterprise ; that the reading of that story by William Carey, the Northamptonshire cobbler, fired his soul to the work. I cannot help thinking that that is an unfortunate way of putting the matter. There are those who say that the men of the *Mayflower*, in their great venture of three centuries ago, were simply under the influence of that restless spirit, which is more or less a feature of the English character, and which had been aroused and sharpened by the reports of rich new worlds across the seas discovered by daring Elizabethan sailors ; but that is to misread the situation completely. Far more weighty and sacred were the powers which were at work within them.

" O 'twas no earth born passion  
That bade the adventurers stray."

We have already seen that in part, at least, their aim and purpose were missionary. Along with this was that undying passion for religious freedom, which is one of the deepest things in man, under whose influence the mightiest achievements have been won, in whose presence fire, dungeon, sword, death are powerless, and which, in the final grapple with tyranny, always wins. So in this other case. Whatever interest in particular peoples and places the reading of the wonderful story of Cook's voyages may have excited, that does not in the least explain why the Christian Church of all sections was so mightily moved and so ready to sacrifice in order to enlighten the world's darkness with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It was the work of the Divine Spirit, in a quite new and powerful way, bringing home to the conscience of the Church the supreme and pressing need of the heathen world. Mr Silvester Horne, in his *Story of the L.M.S.*, puts the matter in truer way when he says: "The passionately Evangelistic spirit of Whitefield communicated itself to very many of those Churches, which were debtors to his spiritual power and religious teaching. A conscience was created among the various Christian communities which were specially brought under the influence of Whitefield and his associates as to the necessity of seeking to save those who were lost in sin and misery at home. This spirit of Evangelism produced as its inevitable fruit a sense of the larger responsibility of the Christian Church." And what specially strikes one, in relation to first missionary effort, is its splendid audacity. Like early Christianity, which sought not easy positions for attack, but the great centres, where heathendom was most strongly entrenched, as Rome and Corinth, Athens and Ephesus, the places to which the first agents of the

London Missionary Society went were the distant islands of the South Seas, whose inhabitants were utterly benighted and savage, where "a long period of trial, persecution, suffering and even martyrdom awaited them," and which could only be reached after months of exposure to perils untold on seas but little known and infested by French privateers. And as one reads of the marvellous triumphs of this New Missionary Spirit, both at home and in foreign fields, it is impossible to resist the feeling that had the Great Revival of the eighteenth century issued in nothing else, the world's debt to it would still be incalculable.

### CHAPTER III

## ENGLAND FOR CHRIST

IN the previous chapter, the work of the New Missionary Spirit, so far as it was considered, was mainly concerned with foreign fields ; but the story of its work among the heathen at home is little less wonderful. From this point of view, the first two decades of the nineteenth century are among the most remarkable in the history of English Christianity. Never before had so serious an effort been made to win England for Christ. Doubtless other Free Churches can tell an almost equally interesting story of worthy endeavour to bring the people of this country within reach of the Gospel, but my concern, in these pages, is with Congregationalism. Those twenty years, in particular, ought to be diligently studied by every Congregationalist, and especially so by every minister and student in our colleges. They are rich in the finest possible romance : quite fittingly may they be called the " Heroic Age of Congregationalism." There is no suggestion in this of any desire to deprive the Great Ejection of 1662 of any of its glory. That period, when men went uncomplainingly into the wilderness of suffering and loss for great religious principles, will forever remain unique in religious history ; but, in a somewhat different way, the men who sought to win England from its heathen darkness, and plant Congregationalism in almost every little village in the land a hundred years ago, give evidence of a courage, a



faith, a readiness to endure suffering and loss, which place them high among the religious heroes of the world. Reference has already been made to the birth of the various County Unions and Associations during that time, the reason for this being the benighted condition of England, rural England in particular, which by co-operative effort it was hoped to change. In like manner with the Home Missionary Society, which, as previously stated, came into being in 1819. It owed its origin to "the piety and zeal" of Mr Thomas Thompson, "a man of marked ability, a great lover of children, a Christian philanthropist of the widest sympathies." The story has been briefly but interestingly told in a small tractate issued in connection with its Centenary by the Rev. J. E. Flower, M.A., until recently the honoured Secretary of the Church Aid and Home Missionary Society. Mr Thompson, who was his father's assistant on the Stock Exchange and in the Bank of England, is said to have devoted his evenings to study and benevolent works. It was when visiting Gloucestershire, Kent and Surrey, that he was "deeply moved by evidences of ignorance, vice and irreligion among the people"; and besides organizing Sunday Schools, Cottage Meetings, Missions for Sailors and Fishermen, and other religious agencies, he engaged missionaries himself in several districts, endeavouring to excite interest in others by offering a prize of £20 "for the best method of introducing the Gospel into country villages." This was really preparatory to the founding of the Home Missionary Society at the London Tavern on 11th August, 1819. Mr Thompson was appointed Treasurer of the new Society; and he held the office for forty six years. It is curious how even an institution like this, so obviously Christian and worthy, should, in

the first instance, have met with opposition. Dr Waddington in his *History* says that "many objections were raised to its formation, too feeble and ridiculous for the most part to enumerate"; and, according to Bennett in his *History of Dissenters*, its title, at the outset, gave offence, on the ground that it "treated as heathen a nation, that in name, at any rate, was Christian." "But," says Dr Dale, "the Society had no difficulty in proving that large districts of the kingdom lay wholly outside the range of ordinary religious organizations; that if the Gospel was to reach them at all it could not be through the ordinary channels; and that they needed a special agency to deliver them from a condition that was one of practical paganism." Take, for example, the West Lancashire coast. The transformation effected there during the last century has been perfectly marvellous. To-day there are long terraces of palatial houses, detached or semi-detached villas, with all kinds of poetical names, lining the coast. Every day great streams of merchant princes may be seen pouring forth from Blackpool, St Annes, Fairhaven, Lytham, Southport, Birkdale and Ainsdale for Manchester, Liverpool and other great centres of industry; and at night crowded trains, specially arranged for their convenience and comfort, carry them back to their homes. The tendency for some years has been for the wealth and social influence of the county to migrate thither. But eighty or a hundred years ago most of the names just given will be sought in vain on any map; for the places scarcely, if at all, existed. In their stead were long stretches of sandhills and rabbit warrens, silent and solitary almost as a desert. Cut off from the line of life the people, who occupied the little villages and hamlets inland, were poor, ignorant and

superstitious to an appalling degree. The Rev. George Greatbatch, writing of his early experiences there, says : " I little thought there was a station at home which so much resembled the ideas I had formed of an uncivilized heathen land. I recalled the awkward gaze wherewith the people looked upon me and the painful feelings of my heart when I retired to a little hovel from among them. Poor creatures ! Such was their ignorance and general behaviour that for a long time my heart sank within me when I must leave my family at Newburgh to preach among them. The thought of living among them would at that time have overwhelmed me." In the *Life of the Rev. Wm. Alexander*, who succeeded Mr Greatbatch at Churchtown, and who worked side by side with him in that district, is a very vivid picture of the deep darkness, which brooded over the place. Referring to the early years of the century, the writer says : " There is no reason to believe that the Gospel was at that time preached in any part of this immense district, so that the people within it were perishing for lack of knowledge. When Mr Greatbatch began his itinerant ministry among them, most of the people were unable to read ; very few of them possessed a Bible ; and multitudes devoted the Sabbath day to the practice of all iniquity. In North Meols [the present Southport] stalls for the sale of cakes, toys, and other articles, and for purposes of gambling, were erected every Sunday on the way to Church. After the service, the bellman stood on a gravestone, and gave notice of the business to be transacted during the week ; and the clergyman spent the evening of that holy day with his jovial companions in the alehouse. Mr Greatbatch having urged the people to read the Bible, an effort was made to find one in some of the houses ; but for some

time unsuccessfully. The churchwarden, it is said, had one ; but when his family were asked the question they stared with all the astonishment of ignorance and said 'they had noan such a thing' ! At length, however, a copy of the New Testament was found at the bottom of a chest in a farmer's house, and the man, who was able to read, opened it towards the middle of one of the Evangelists. After he had read aloud for some time of the treatment which Christ received from the Scribes and Pharisees, one of the party who was listening said within himself, ' They'll kill that fellow before they have done with him ' ; and then asked the reader how long it would be before they would hear of ' th' mon being kilt.' He took hold of about half the leaves of the book, and replied, ' he should have to read haply all that before they came to the part which told about his being kilt.' As the history was deemed to be too long to be continued then, the book was closed. The man who asked the question was afterwards converted under Mr Greatbatch's ministry, and continued a consistent member of the Church for more than forty years. In that same parish, when Mr Honeywood and Mr Hacking, the first Itinerants, had preached a few times, one of the people said to his neighbours, ' You may think what you like but I think they are *highwaymen*, for every time they have come to preach there has been a storm of wind.' "

Nor was it much better in other parts of Lancashire. The Fylde, for example, is described as " the most dark and most miserable part of the county," " awfully obscured with the mists of popish ignorance, error and superstition " ; in Oldham the difficulties were so serious that it took thirty years of continuous effort for the present Queen Street Church to become firmly established ;

Burnley is said to be "a licentious place" with many "profligate characters"; the Colne and Barrowford area is referred to as "most destitute and barren." In the Prescott district, near Liverpool, it is said that "much sensuality, as well as intemperance prevailed among the working classes, and the language of young women, even in the public streets, was in the highest degree disgusting and polluting. The vulgar and cruel sport of cock-fighting was, if possible, exceeded by that of bull-baiting; which was to the multitude a most attractive and exciting amusement; and the more fierce and terrible the antagonism between the infuriated bull and the merciless dogs, the louder became the shout of savage joy from the men and women that mingled in the crowd. On the first Monday and Tuesday in Easter, these bull-baiters and cock-fighters, with their wives and daughters, became 'lifters,' a profane and popish custom, originally practised in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ. Parties, containing from four to eight persons in each, paraded the streets; and every one, who was thought suitable for the purpose, was seized by the feet and arms, and then tossed up horizontally, as high as the lifters could, and never less than three times. They were caught in coming down, amidst the shouts and laughter of the spectators, some of whom ought to have known better. On the Monday the men lifted the women, and on the Tuesday the women returned the compliment by as lustily lifting the men. To this rude and profane treatment, everyone who was caught was compelled to submit, unless he exempted himself by the payment of a fine, which some would not and others could not do." Much more of this sort of thing might easily be given from the literature of the time, and Lancashire was not exceptional in this matter. The early Reports of the

Home Missionary Society cast a lurid light upon the benighted condition of the country in those opening years of the nineteenth century. After a visit to Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, and parts of Lancashire, a certain minister writes: "The state of many, very many villages and several towns is truly affecting; they have no man that cares for their souls, and are consequently perishing in their sins, being ignorant of the only way of salvation. Darkness covers this part of England, and gross darkness the people." Another referring to Northumberland alone, says: "The more internal parts are awfully destitute; and the people are living in the greatest darkness and wickedness. In most of the places I have mentioned the people spend their Sabbath in gambling and drunkenness." A Yorkshire minister's statement of the condition of his county is to the effect that it is "most distressing, affording on all sides facilities for greatly increased exertion, but everywhere without means of supporting the Gospel." A North Devonshire minister's testimony reads thus: "To see thousands around us perishing for the lack of knowledge without having the means of assisting them is truly painful; the places are dark and stand in great need of spiritual instruction." Another in South Devon "draws a most affecting picture of the state of many of the villages, some of which are even without Bibles." The Rev. Timothy East of Birmingham, in a published sermon, says: "The county of Worcester, which contains 152 parishes, and, according to the census in 1811, 160,546 inhabitants, has been termed the Garden of England, but in a moral light, *it may be regarded as a waste howling wilderness.*" In support of this another writes: "This part of the island, Worcestershire and Herefordshire, is, I believe,



one of the darkest districts that you will meet with. In Worcestershire we have no Itinerant. There are ten Baptist Churches, and four Independent, who occupy the *towns*, and there are two or three of Lady Huntingdon's Chapels, but the villages are neglected." In reference to Warwickshire it is said that out of thirty villages visited "only five have the Gospel regularly and one occasionally. The population of these places taken together will be found to exceed 11,000, not more than 1000 of whom have the sound of the Gospel from any denomination of ministers." The number of "destitute villages of a similar population" in the county, it is said, might be doubled. We read that "in Staffordshire, with a population of about 300,000, half are distributed over the whole space of the county in small villages and hamlets, the greater part of whom are in a state to excite our commiseration. They sit in darkness and the gloomy shades of overspreading death. In the extreme northern part, a large space on the Shropshire side of the county, and especially a large district scattered in the neighbourhood of Lichfield, is in the most pitable state." Oxfordshire is said to "present but a dreary desert. Large villages and even towns within its boundaries and on its borders are deplorably ignorant of the way of salvation ; it is a moral wilderness of awful dimensions, extending from village to village in large numbers." Concerning several villages in Berks, one writes : " No one unacquainted with similar scenes can form an adequate idea of the extreme ignorance of the inhabitants of these villages. Not only these villages but a number of others near us are similarly situated ; in one of them the villagers are in a state of complete mental darkness."

Similarly with other counties. Somerset, Wiltshire,

Dorset, Cornwall, Cheshire, Norfolk and many other places appear in the Reports; and all are said to present immense areas in an absolutely neglected condition religiously, with the result that ignorance, superstition, intemperance, and crime were powerfully present. It has already been stated that, when the Home Missionary Society was founded, one objection in certain quarters was to the name, because it carried with it the suggestion that England was still heathen; and no one can lift the veil from the England of that day, without realizing how well founded the suggestion was, and how tremendously pressing and great was the need for some such missionary agency as the Society was intended to provide.

This, then, was the England which faced Congregationalism a century ago, and which it set itself to win for Christ; and the men who were sent to this task by the Home Missionary Society, by County Union and County Association, by Itinerant Societies of various types and names, and by individual Churches and even private persons, went to it with a faith, a courage, a joy, and an enthusiasm positively marvellous. Their letters, reports and biographies furnish as real and thrilling a piece of adventure and romance as can be met with anywhere. Apart from the spiritual destitution of the country, it was a time of almost overwhelming difficulty for such work. For several years the world was occupied, this country in particular, with the endeavour to break Napoleon's attempt to win world power; and the other part of the period was the aftermath of the war, often, as we are now proving, as difficult and perilous as the war itself. It is indeed interesting to note that the story of that time corresponds almost exactly with our own; history does

repeat itself. One writes of it as follows: "After the great struggle was over, and peace had been permanently restored, there was leisure to count the cost and to make an estimate of the position. The pecuniary sacrifices exacted had been enormous. From two hundred millions, the National Debt, in spite of the vast amounts raised by taxation, had advanced to above eight hundred millions, involving a yearly outlay of above thirty millions for interest to public creditors alone. Trade was in a depressed state; the manufacturers were overstocked, and the foreign markets to a large extent closed against England by prohibitive tariffs. The great numbers of men thrown out of employment by that discontinuance of the war, and unable to obtain work, were further exasperated by the high price of bread, which had been produced they declared by the prohibition on foreign corn, in the interests of the great landlords, who thus thrived amid the general distress. The ignorant and suffering men attributing their misfortunes to the substitution of machinery for hand labour, attacked the manufactories and Luddite Riots were again rife." Yet this was the time chosen for that great enterprise, the pressure of the need refusing to wait for "a more convenient season." With that magnificent audacity, which characterized early Christianity and Foreign Missionary enterprise, the worst, most difficult, and most benighted places also were often selected as the first centres of operation. The Itinerants had all kinds of dangers to face; they travelled roads which were almost impassable, and in dark nights especially were exceedingly perilous and lonely; they crossed rivers swollen by rains; faced ignorance made dangerous by superstition; were roughly handled by fanatical and angry

mobs ; and frequently stood in real jeopardy of life. We read of one who met with " a degree of persecution that would disgrace the character of a savage," and who was obliged to seek " legal protection against his ferocious enemies, from whose fury he has at times been almost miraculously preserved." In another case the windows of the house where he preached were broken, his bridle and saddle cut to pieces, and he himself was felled to the ground by a blow which disabled him from walking and for a while threatened his life. Another had his premises set on fire and the chief part of his property consumed. Respecting another we read : " On many a wild night he and his pony had to struggle with the tempest and only reached home at midnight, drenched with rain and benumbed with cold." In relation to yet another it is said that " Persecution was common, and sometimes his life was seriously endangered by the bitterness and malice of his opponents " ; whilst he himself writes : " Dark nights and bad roads make my journeys home unpleasant, but while the people are willing to attend I hope I shall find pleasure in spending my legs and my lungs in the service of their precious souls." This sort of thing might be multiplied to almost any extent and it relates to the whole of the country. The Itinerants covered immense areas. In Lancashire, for example, we read of one taking into his sphere of operations, Newton-le-Willows, Hindley, Ashton-in-Makerfield, Thatto Heath, Tarbuck, Haydock, and Leigh. The Itinerary of another took in Edge Green, Westhoughton, Chowbent, Lowton, Hurst Mill, and Astley Green. Another had Caton, Hornby, Wray, Warton, Burton, Milnthorpe, Lowgill, Bentham, and Arkholme. One had Southport, Blowick, Crossens, Ormskirk, Bickerstaffe, Rufford,

Bretherton, Leyland and Eccleston ; and yet another Emmott Lane, Mosshouses, Barrowford, Fence, Rough Lee, Lower Colne, Twiston, Newby and Gill. In Cumberland, Mr Gouge of Aspatria, is said to have succeeded in introducing the Gospel into nine villages ; in Westmorland Mr Selbie is given as having twelve preaching places, one of which was the county town. Cheshire had one station with seven preaching places ; Devonshire two stations, one with thirteen preaching places and the other with seven ; Durham had three stations, one with five preaching places, another with twelve and the third with ten ; Norfolk had two, one with eleven preaching places and the other with five ; Somerset had two, one with nine preaching places and the other with seven ; Staffordshire had two, one with ten preaching places and the other with seven ; Sussex had two, one with nine preaching places and the other with four ; Wiltshire had two, one with thirteen preaching places and the other with fifteen ; Worcestershire had one with seven preaching places ; Yorkshire one with eighteen preaching places ; Bucks one with four preaching places ; Hereford one with eight preaching places ; Lincolnshire one with four preaching places ; Oxfordshire one with five preaching places ; Rutlandshire one with seven preaching places ; and Warwickshire one with five preaching places. In the pursuit of their mission they were frequently away from home days together. In a letter, dated 24th November, 1829, Mr Alexander humorously refers to these Itineraries in the following terms : “ Two years ago I took up the trade of a travelling Scotchman (you know there are many in this country). About once a month I take a tour of about thirty miles and sometimes forty. I go from house to house, read, pray, and converse with the

families and give or rather lend them tracts. This occupies three or four days. I preach in the evenings and sometimes in the afternoons also." He frequently journeyed to Liverpool, some twenty miles from his station, and generally went on foot, usually halting on the way at two or three villages, where he would hire a cottage at a small charge for the purpose of preaching to the people. These services he called his "restings." The cottage, the barn, the village green, the open field were their preaching places. Simple, unlettered men who had never been inside a college, and whose English was not always faultless, many of them were. Others were the product of the little academies, which were quite a feature of eighteenth and early nineteenth century Congregationalism. Such were James McQuhae's of Blackburn, and William Roby's of Manchester, which prepared the way for the Blackburn Academy, eventually to become the Lancashire College; William Vint's of Idle and James Scott's of Heckmondwike, now represented by the Yorkshire United College; Newport Pagnell, with Mr Bull as tutor; Western, and previously Axminster, with a dozen others in various parts of the country. What these institutions did, through the men they trained and sent forth full of Evangelistic zeal, to help the Evangelical Revival and give modern Congregationalism its present position, it is not possible to say. Trained and untrained alike, those simple Itinerant preachers went to their task with an enthusiasm that compelled success. Their salaries were small, never more than £80 a year, often not half that amount, and frequently they had considerable families to rear upon it. Some of the names of these true Christian heroes have fortunately been preserved.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER, for example, has already been



mentioned several times. When quite young he came to Lancaster from Stoneykirk, in Wigtownshire, Scotland, was a member of the High Street Congregational Church, and whilst there began to preach in the villages lying around the town. He was fixed for a time at Prescott and then at Leigh, subsequently labouring at Churchtown, all in Lancashire. His son was the Rev. John Alexander, so long the distinguished minister of Princes Street, Norwich. William Alexander died on 23rd January, 1854, at the age of ninety two years, and was laid to rest in Southport Cemetery.

GEORGE GREATBATCH has also been repeatedly named. He preceded Mr Alexander at Churchtown and removed thence to Southport. He has been deservedly called "the Father of Congregationalism" in Southport and district. After a long and honoured life he "fell on sleep" in 1864, and also rests in the Cemetery at Southport.

JOSEPH COCKIN may be cited for Yorkshire. His *Life*, written by his son, John, also in the Congregational ministry, is marvellously interesting reading, as are most of those old biographies. One, indeed, sometimes feels that a real service might be done to the cause of religion and to Congregationalism especially, if some of these old biographies lying unopened on bookshelves and scattered about in second hand book shops could be collected, large extracts from them put together, and issued in book form. Joseph Cockin was one of James Scott's students of Heckmondwike Academy, and in his Evangelistic fervour and zeal he may be regarded as typical of the men trained there. His life was lived in less rural districts than some. He settled first at Kipping and afterwards at Square Church, Halifax, but



his enthusiasm for the spread of religion widened the sphere of his labours far beyond these places. "After preaching at home in the morning and afternoon on the Sabbath day," says his biographer, "he has ridden to Skipton to preach that night, a distance of seventeen miles. It must be observed that the afternoon service began earlier and the evening service later than they do now, and, therefore, the interval between them was longer than it is at present. Bingley with its neighbourhood and the parishes of Keighley, and Haworth became the frequent scenes of his exertions; Booth, Illingworth, and Northowram were often favoured with his occasional services; Hipperholm, Wibsey, and Brighouse experienced the benefit of his ministrations. In short, the readiest way to tell all his posts of service and scenes of exertion, would be to enumerate every town, village, and hamlet around Kipping; for it may be fairly questioned whether there is one at which he never preached, and at most of them he preached very often. . . . His ruling motives in all were gratitude to God, love to men, and zeal for the cause of Christ. As to fee or reward, in these itinerant labours, he neither had it, nor expected it." Largely through his influence an Itinerant Society for Yorkshire was formed at Heckmondwike on 18th August, 1811; and a vivid account is given of an Itinerary undertaken by himself and others, when he was fifty six years of age, which practically covered the Craven district. "We begin our labours," says he, "at Keighley on Monday evening, proceed about thirty-five miles up into the country, preach every evening and finish our course at Addingham on the Thursday evening of the next week. On Tuesday we travel to Thornton, which is fourteen miles from Keighley, where about eighty persons attended the

services in a room in a house. Gisburn, which is about eight miles distant, is our station on Wednesday. Here we occupy two rooms, which are usually filled to excess. About seven miles from Gisburn and near Tosside Chapel, is Sandysyke, where the people highly value the Gospel. On these rugged heights we stop on Friday morning; the whole scene is waste and wild; and, from these dreary abodes of the children of the Kingdom, we descend through a rough country to Settle, which is about eleven miles distant, where are a few steady friends greatly attached to the cause. The utmost extent of our journey is Bentham, which is eleven miles from Settle, and to which we go on Saturday and preach that evening and twice on the ensuing Sabbath. On Monday we come to Long Preston, which is four miles from Settle, and where there are people of various religious sentiments. Bell-Busk, our station on Tuesday, is a rural place and thinly inhabited. Gargreave comes next. When seven o'clock comes a room is furnished with benches, candles, and musical instruments, and about sixty people attend. The last station is Long Addingham, about eleven miles from Gargreave. Here we cease from our labours, direct our course homewards, and add our fervent prayers that God would bless the Word preached and make it effectual to salvation. This account indicates that we have retained much favour and that we have encountered much opposition; that our labours have been arduous and that our success has been considerable; that our progress calls for thankfulness and that our prospects excite pleasing hopes." The mere physical strain involved in such an Itinerary must have been very great, and we need not be surprised to read towards the end: "Our Itinerant by this time is nearly worn out," and his

“languid frame” has had to be nursed and his “drooping spirits” cheered; and it all represents the free, loving service of a man who was all aglow with enthusiasm for the salvation of men.

JOHN SCOTT was engaged by the Home Missionary Society in Weardale, in the county of Durham, where he had, at least, six places under his care. He was a native of London, trained at Hackney College, and settled at Hexham in 1809. “In season and out of season,” says his biographer respecting this period, “by the regular labours of the pulpit and by extraordinary services abroad in cottages and in fields, in fairs and racecourses, in Sabbath schools and on the platform he fulfilled his high vocation.” The interests at Haydonbridge, Corbridge and Brampton mainly owe their existence to his exertions. In 1821 he became the agent of the Home Missionary Society, and for five years laboured unceasingly in the Weardale area. Subsequently he was at Parkhead, Cumberland, and Sidmouth, Devon; and, in 1824, he returned to Hexham. Owing, however, to physical weakness he was unable to resume pastoral work; but, when his strength permitted, he preached in his own house. He died at Hexham on 19th January, 1851, at the age of sixty five years.

WILLIAM JOSEPH was stationed at Market Deeping in Lincolnshire, and, along with this, he served Etton, Glington, and Peakirk. Originally a Wesleyan, he eventually joined the Church at Birmingham, of which the Rev. Jehoiada Brewer was minister. Accepted by the Home Missionary Society, he was ordained pastor of the Church at Market Deeping. Suffering from ague, a more genial climate was sought, and later he laboured at Worksop, Earl Shilton and Coleshill. He died at

Edgbaston on 25th July, 1867, at the age of seventy four years.

WILLIAM HOOD was one of the first agents of the Home Missionary Society. He received some training for the ministry from the Rev R. M. Miller of Atherstone, of which place he was a native. He was fixed at Wroxton, near Banbury, and had some four or five places associated with that station. At this period it is said that he preached seven times in a week and walked more than fifty miles. In his journal he thus writes: "On the Sabbath day I walk twelve miles and preach twice at Bourton and once at Wroxton; on Monday I walk fourteen miles to preach at Clayton; on Tuesday seven miles to preach at Bairstow; on Wednesday six miles to preach at Wroxton; and on Thursday ten miles to preach at King's Sutton; in addition to which I have many excursions connected with my missionary work." He removed to Solihull after a short time, and this became "a missionary station the centre of the numerous dark and destitute villages in the neighbourhood." Later he was at Oldbury in Staffordshire, West Bromwich, and Armitage, near Lichfield. He died at West Bromwich on 27th December, 1860, at the age of sixty six years.

WILLIAM SELBIE was appointed by the Home Missionary Society to labour in Teesdale, in the county of Durham. Here he had charge of ten preaching places. He was a native of Aberdeen, and after some preliminary training was sent by the Edinburgh Missionary Society to Astrakan, but, this station being abandoned after about three years, he came to England and, having been accepted by the Home Missionary Society, he was sent to itinerate in the county of Durham. Later he was at Aspatria in Cumberland, Great Thurlow in Suffolk, and

Great Horwood and Whaddon, Bucks. He retired in 1870, and died at the last named place in December 1877, at the age of seventy three years.

J. GOUGE was sent by the Home Missionary Society to Aspatria, in Cumberland, where he had Tallentire, West Newton, and Dearham also under his care. It is described as "a dark and benighted place." He was a native of Kent, originally an Episcopalian, but eventually accepting Congregationalism, he gave himself heartily to Sunday School work and village preaching. He laboured in Cumberland "amidst much opposition"; and, in June 1832, "his health having failed from overwhelming engagements," he removed to Polesworth in Warwickshire. Later he was at Dittisham, Devon, and again at Polesworth. He died here on 4th May, 1870, at the age of eighty four years.

JOHN BALL was for some time stationed at Eccleshall in Staffordshire. He was born at Gloucester, in 1780, being among the first scholars in the Sunday School founded by Robert Raikes. He was originally a local preacher among the Wesleyans, but his Calvinism led to his suspension from that body. Next he was sent by Lady Ann Erskine to preach at Zion Chapel, White-chapel, and afterwards as a supply to Sudbury in Suffolk. Subsequently he laboured about a dozen years at Newark in Nottinghamshire. In 1815 he removed to London, where he opened a Day School at Clapham; but, on the formation of the Home Missionary Society, he became one of its first agents, being sent for a short time to the neighbourhood of Banbury. Thence he was removed to Eccleshall, where he had some eight preaching places attached to his station. In 1835 he was appointed to Southam in Warwickshire, where, amidst much bodily weakness, he laboured some three

and a half years. He died on 27th July, 1838, at the age of fifty eight years.

JOHN BISHOP was a native of London, on his mother's side descended from the Scottish Covenanters. At the age of eighteen years he joined the Surrey Church, of which Rowland Hill was minister, and, even in those early years, is said to have been much in request as "village workhouse and prison preacher." The great destitution of many of the villages deeply affected him, and it is recorded that he impressed many "other minds with the great need for a Home Missionary Society," such as afterwards came into being. Accepting an invitation from that Society, he was sent to Wisborough Green in Sussex, where he had nine preaching places attached to his station. Four times on the Sunday and five times during the week he was in the habit of preaching, very often riding forty or more miles for the purpose. He was subsequently at Lewes, Newport (Isle of Wight), Chard, Bridgwater and Axminster. He died at this place quite suddenly on 9th March, 1862, at the age of sixty eight years.

HENRY LARTER was one of the first agents of the Home Missionary Society, being sent by it to Highworth, in Wiltshire, where he had thirteen preaching places under his care. He was originally a member of the Church at Homerton, and in 1816 his intimate friend, David Darling, having been accepted by the London Missionary Society and sent to the South Seas, his mind was directed to Christian work, and he joined the London Itinerant Society, "under whose sanction he preached in most of the villages within ten miles of London. On the Sabbath he not infrequently walked twenty six miles and preached twice." He remained at Highworth about twenty seven years and then removed to Maiden

Newton in Dorsetshire, being later at Langford in Oxfordshire. He died here, in October 1862, at the age of seventy years.

THOMAS SHARP was born at Hull, but he early became an errand boy in Manchester, where he "learned to write and was introduced into the Excise." He lost his situation here through petitioning for an increase of wages at the suggestion of his fellow clerks, and removed to London, where he eventually won considerable success in business. He joined the Church at Silver Street under the pastoral care of the Rev. John Newton. The moral condition of the peasants of Devonshire led him to relinquish business and retire thither, so that he might work among them. He settled in the vicinity of Barnstaple, "studying by day and going out to the lanes and back streets to gather the poor into cottages and rooms that he might pray with them and exhort them to turn to the living God." In 1809 he assumed the pastoral charge of the Church at Chumleigh. "He took a house and farm," writes his biographer, "thinking thereby to support himself and family and to preach the Gospel without charge. By dishonesty of servants, and by fire, he lost all his property and became dependent on his labour for maintenance. He laboured incessantly both in and for miles around Chumleigh. Four times on the Sabbath he preached, and nearly every night in the week witnessed his self denying labours. He was the means of accomplishing much good and of laying the foundation for future congregations." Mr Sharp was asked by the Home Missionary Society to be one of its first missionaries in Devon, and taking Chumleigh as his centre, he had associated with it twelve other preaching places. He remained in this work until 1847, when he removed to North Lawton, where



he died on 7th February, 1858, at the age of eighty seven years.

Two other names may be included in this list, though they represent very different men from those already mentioned. The first is that of CAPTAIN JONATHAN SCOTT. His main life was lived somewhat anterior to the period, with which we are more particularly concerned ; but he is much too interesting a character to be omitted, and he serves as a link directly connecting the Evangelical Revival with the Itinerant preachers of the opening years of the nineteenth century. He was a Shropshire man, being born near Shrewsbury, and for some time followed a military life ; but, after his conversion, he became associated with Whitefield and did much to help forward the Evangelical Revival in its great work. He was ordained "a minister at large" at Lancaster, on 18th September, 1776 ; and Preston, Elswick, Garstang, Ulverston as well as Lancaster, all in Lancashire, owe much to his labours. In Shropshire, Staffordshire, Derbyshire and Cheshire also he itinerated considerably ; indeed, as one reads the story of Congregationalism in those five counties, one incessantly meets with his name, and many of the Congregational interests in them can be traced to his work. It is said that he frequently travelled from "eighteen to twenty miles on the Lord's Day" ; devoted his wealth as well as himself to the Master's service ; that his preaching was "fearless and forcible, somewhat rugged, altogether unadorned, but powerful to the pulling down of the strongholds of Satan." At the age of seventy two years he died on 28th May, 1807, and was buried in a vault in Queen Street Chapel, Chester.

The other name is GEORGE BURDER. He was pre-eminently a man full of the missionary spirit. Lancaster,

Coventry, and London were the spheres in which he exercised his ministry, and in all these places he was "in labours more abundant" in his desire to extend the Redeemer's Kingdom. The *Memoirs* by his son, Dr H. F. Burder, is wonderfully illuminating in this respect; and in reference to his life in Lancaster we read:

"1777. During this winter Mr Gibbons and I preached alternately in Lancaster and Ulverstone, each of us in general two Sabbaths in turn. I had some very dangerous journeys across the sands when the tide was out between those places (twenty-one miles) and went through considerable fatigue, but was mercifully preserved.

"I used to go a little circuit east of Lancaster, towards the borders of Yorkshire, on the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday about every other week. In some of these places I had most miserable accommodation, and sometimes endured much from the weather, bad beds, and other annoyances. There were also some villages near Lancaster where I used to preach occasionally, and also some in the neighbourhood of Ulverstone. . . .

"1779. On a review of my journeys, I find I have ridden on horseback this year about 2,500 miles and have preached 254 times, besides a variety of exhortations at prayer meetings and church meetings. Lord, I desire to give Thee the glory of all the strength, health, and ability enabling me so to do.

"1780. I continued to make my preaching circuits frequently to Bootle, Kirksanton, Broughton and Kendal northward; and to Settle, Mewith, etc., in other directions.

"1781. Monday, 12th March. Preached out of doors at Shiffnal in the afternoon. Here a drummer

came, hired on purpose, and beat his drum directly before me, so I was obliged to desist. The same evening I preached at Sheriff-Hales ; on Tuesday at Drayton ; on Wednesday at Wem ; and on Thursday at Wrexham. This was the only time I preached in Wales ; the people seemed all alive, and sang so loud that it shook the pulpit. Friday I preached at Nantwich, and on Saturday evening at Burslem.

“On Lord’s Day morning I preached at Burslem in a house, and in the afternoon out of doors at Hanley to a very large and attentive congregation. This was the beginning of the preaching there ; where, afterwards, a long room was taken, and then the Tabernacle built. Hanley was thought the central place of the pottery, and best situated for a Chapel. In the evening I preached at Newcastle.

“March 19. Evening. Preached to a great number, more than the house could contain, at Shiffnall ; many came in consequence of the drummer’s opposition the week before. Thank the drummer.

“April 2, 1781. But two days since I returned from a preaching journey of 500 miles. I was in company more than once with Mr John Wesley. I heard him four times ; twice I liked him much, a few things excepted.”

During this time Mr Burder was the minister of the High Street Congregational Church, Lancaster ; and, in November 1783 he removed to Coventry, having accepted the unanimous invitation of the West Orchard Church. Here he was much what he had been in Lancaster in the matter of missionary work. The reader may be referred with advantage to *Independency in Warwickshire* by the Revs. John Sibree and M. Caston. Very striking are the pictures there

sketched of the sad moral condition of that county in the period in question, and of the brave attempts to win it for Christ by men whom no persecution, suffering, peril, or threat could turn from their purpose. Prominent among these are Captain Jonathan Scott and George Burder, who saw much of Scott and was on terms of intimacy with him. Referring to the fact that Mr Burder was largely responsible for the formation of the Warwickshire Association of Ministers in 1793, whose purpose was the "spread of the Gospel both at home and abroad"; also to his being one of the founders of the London Missionary Society, the authors of the *History* say: "He laboured indefatigably amidst much opposition and violence, to introduce the Gospel into the destitute towns and villages of the county." After twenty years there, he removed to Fetter Lane, London, and here as in Lancaster and Coventry he was the missionary enthusiast. Along with his pastoral work he served the London Missionary Society as "gratuitous Secretary" for nearly twenty four years. In the eightieth year of his age, he died on 29th May, 1832; his remains were laid in the family vault in Bunhill Fields on 5th June, "the eightieth anniversary of his birth."

These and many others, whose names have perished, were the men who gave themselves to the difficult but magnificent work of winning England for Christ a century ago. To say that they were great men is scarcely sufficient. A large proportion of their work was purely voluntary, their aim always being to widen wherever possible the sphere of their operations; and at best they were badly paid and often must have been face to face with real privation and want. They sent their reports regularly to the various bodies that em-

ployed them, but we never read of any pressure from these bodies for more and better service. They met with difficulties and perils without number, but nothing ever checked their zeal or damped their enthusiasm. To enter their presence, even at this distance of time, and through the printed word, is like meeting a fresh and delightful breeze from the heavenly hills. One feels that they were under the influence of a tremendous urge, the urge of a Divine passion, the passion of the Cross, and that they found their joy and life in telling its story to the ignorant and benighted people around them, whose souls they intensely loved and whom, if unsparing service could do it, they were resolved to secure for Christ.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS AND LESSONS

WHAT has been the result of the endeavour to evangelize England a century ago, with which the preceding pages are occupied? Has there been any result at all commensurate with the heroic effort then made? At the present moment there is abroad a considerable amount of pessimism in relation to religion. It has been repeatedly said, even by responsible religious leaders, that organized Christianity has seriously failed and that in recent days the Churches have given evidence of most lamentable weakness. The difficulties of the time appear for some to have obliterated all memory of Christianity's great past, and to have overlaid the future with deep and impenetrable shadow. The answer, in part at least, to all this, is the contrast between the England of our day and that of a hundred years ago. It is not for a moment suggested that all is well with it to-day. In town and city, village and hamlet alike, it is easy to discover much that is most undesirable; in some areas much more so than in others; but in all enough to fill with anxiety and sorrow any, to whom the Kingdom of Christ is a matter of real concern. But when that has been admitted, it has to be said that the transformation which has taken place during the last century has been enormous. It may be thought that the picture painted in the previous chapter is overdone, that the colours are much too sombre; but it is far other-

wise, the reality was vastly more tragic and sad than any description could possibly represent. We stand to-day at an immense distance from those who preceded us in life's way, and nothing is to be gained by closing our eyes to the fact ; on the contrary, that fact should be set in the fullest and clearest light, that it may hearten and encourage for future endeavour. It is not, of course, claimed that the change has been wrought by Congregationalism alone. Other Churches have, doubtless, contributed greatly in that direction ; but no Denomination has done more than Congregationalism ; indeed, I think facts would quite justify one in saying that no one has done so much.

Consider also the debt which modern Congregationalism owes to that effort. Not a few of our Churches have magnificent histories behind them. They reach back to Ejection times ; they have borne faithful witness to great Christian principles through long, dark days of difficulty and peril, and we hold them in high and deserved honour. Some of our Churches of the latter half of the eighteenth century represent secessions from the older Nonconformist foundations, which had drifted into Unitarianism. A remnant holding to the Evangelical faith, strengthened and encouraged doubtless by the great Revival, whose beneficent results were everywhere before their eyes, took themselves off and founded a Church along more distinctly Congregational lines. But many of the others may be claimed as the result, direct or indirect, of the work of those Itinerant preachers referred to in the previous chapter. We know, for example, that in great centres like Southport, Blackpool, Burnley and Oldham, the Gospel was directly introduced by those men, and, in the Congregationalism of those great Lancashire towns to-day, we have the fruit



of their labours. And what is true of Lancashire will be found to be not less true of other counties, when the story of Congregationalism in them comes to be examined. A glance at the *Congregational Year Book* is exceedingly significant in this respect, and the following figures will help the reader to appreciate the position. Some of the dates in the *Year Book* may not be quite correct—indeed, I am sure that some are not—but they are sufficiently so for my purpose. I have taken the Unions in the order in which they appear in the book, omitting London and restricting the inquiry to English Unions. The Ejection Period includes all up to the end of the Seventeenth Century; the Eighteenth Century all up to 1790; the Itinerant Period all from 1790 to about 1825; and the rest fall under the Nineteenth Century.

## BEDFORDSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	1
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	2
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	8
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	14
					<u>25</u>

## BERKS, SOUTH OXON, AND SOUTH BUCKS UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	10
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	5
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	26
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	46
					<u>87</u>

## BUCKINGHAMSHIRE (NORTH) UNION AND NORTH OXON

Ejection	.	.	.	.	4
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	20
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	24
					<u>51</u>

## CAMBRIDGESHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	8
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	14
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	28
					—
					<u>53</u>

## CHESHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	3
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	8
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	16
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	72
					—
					<u>99</u>

## CORNWALL UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	3
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	4
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	10
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
					—
					<u>20</u>

## DERBYSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	6
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	10
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	10
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	33
					—
					<u>59</u>

## DEVON UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	19
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	9
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	32
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	69
					—
					<u>129</u>

## CONGREGATIONALISM

## DORSET ASSOCIATION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	17
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	13
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	24
					—
					<u>57</u>

## DURHAM AND NORTHUMBERLAND UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	1
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	4
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	10
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	55
					—
					<u>70</u>

## ESSEX UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	24
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	7
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	26
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	105
					—
					<u>162</u>

## GLOUCESTER AND HEREFORD UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	15
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	15
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	30
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	114
					—
					<u>174</u>

## HAMPSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	16
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	5
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	20
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	82
					—
					<u>123</u>

## CHANNEL ISLANDS DISTRICT

Ejection	.	.	.	.	0
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	0
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	9
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
					<hr/>
					12
					<hr/>

## HERTFORDSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	9
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	8
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	22
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	26
					<hr/>
					65
					<hr/>

HUNTINGDONSHIRE UNION OF INDEPENDENT AND  
BAPTIST CHURCHES

Ejection	.	.	.	.	5
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	1
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	4
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	20
					<hr/>
					30
					<hr/>

## KENT ASSOCIATION AND COUNTY MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Ejection	.	.	.	.	10
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	10
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	24
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	89
					<hr/>
					133
					<hr/>

## LANCASHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	11
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	16
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	40
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	254
					<hr/>
					321
					<hr/>

## CONGREGATIONALISM

## CUMBERLAND, NOW INCLUDED IN LANCASHIRE

Ejection	.	.	.	.	6
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	5
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	3
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	18
					—
					<u>32</u>

## LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	10
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	1
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	12
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	37
					—
					<u>60</u>

## LINCOLNSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	1
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	6
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	10
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	19
					—
					<u>36</u>

## NORFOLK UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	8
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	3
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	14
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	20
					—
					<u>45</u>

## NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ASSOCIATION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	16
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	9
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	7
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	24
					—
					<u>56</u>

## NOTTINGHAMSHIRE UNION

Ejection . . . .	4
Eighteenth Century . .	1
Itinerant . . . .	7
Nineteenth Century . .	19
	<hr/>
	31

## SHROPSHIRE UNION

Ejection . . . .	3
Eighteenth Century . .	5
Itinerant . . . .	15
Nineteenth Century . .	37
	<hr/>
	60

## SOMERSET UNION

Ejection . . . .	12
Eighteenth Century . .	7
Itinerant . . . .	20
Nineteenth Century . .	41
	<hr/>
	80

## STAFFORDSHIRE UNION

Ejection . . . .	4
Eighteenth Century . .	10
Itinerant . . . .	18
Nineteenth Century . .	44
	<hr/>
	76

## SUFFOLK UNION

Ejection . . . .	19
Eighteenth Century . .	9
Itinerant . . . .	12
Nineteenth Century . .	52
	<hr/>
	2

## SURREY UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	13
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	1
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	20
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	97
					<hr/>
					<u>131</u>

## SUSSEX UNION AND HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Ejection	.	.	.	.	0
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	7
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	21
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	88
					<hr/>
					<u>116</u>

## WARWICKSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	3
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	7
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	24
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	54
					<hr/>
					<u>88</u>

## WILTS AND EAST SOMERSET UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	10
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	21
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	23
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	20
					<hr/>
					<u>74</u>

## WORCESTERSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	3
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	1
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	7
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	23
					<hr/>
					<u>34</u>



## YORKSHIRE UNION

Ejection	.	.	.	.	21
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	28
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	70
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	195
					<hr/>
					314

## FOR ALL UNIONS

Ejection	.	.	.	.	295
Eighteenth Century	.	.	.	.	243
Itinerant	.	.	.	.	577
Nineteenth Century	.	.	.	.	1849
					<hr/>
					2964

The Churches founded during the Itinerant Period are therefore about one fifth of the total number. It is not claimed that these figures are more than approximately correct. I imagine, for example, that in most places there are more Churches belonging to the Ejection Period than those actually given. So again the Eighteenth Century Churches appear to be comparatively few, and I do not claim to have the local knowledge which enables me to say how each one originated, though I imagine that most owe their origin to the Evangelical Revival. Yet again, it may be that all under the Itinerant Period do not belong to it; but, directly or indirectly, I am persuaded that most do, and it will be seen that the number is very considerable. Of course, the largest number belong to the Nineteenth Century; but it needs to be remembered that, whilst for these nearly a century has been allowed, for the Itinerant Churches there are only about thirty five years. Whichever way, therefore, the matter is viewed, the debt to that period is exceedingly great; Congregationalism

won a magnificent triumph through the untiring labours of those worthy men.

What now may be learned from that story? The value surely of the Spiritual in religion and in Congregationalism especially. The Church has always seen its greatest days when it has been most faithful to its spiritual ideals. The Puritanism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as the name would suggest, was pre-eminently a spiritual movement, and how much it achieved the pages of history record. The Evangelical Revival obtained its power to do the wonderful things, which everywhere attended it, from the spiritual Gospel which its great leaders everywhere proclaimed; and the Itinerant preachers of a hundred years ago found their power to achieve in the same Gospel. The point is one which calls for serious consideration at the present time. The demand to-day is that the Church shall be more "human," that its attitude towards the social life of the people shall cease to be one of reserve and aloofness, and that it shall look upon the amusements of the time with a different eye from the one it has been accustomed to use. All this sounds well enough; but may there not be concealed within it a temptation of the utmost seriousness? Is the Church always wise in bending to the demand of the age? What is the age? It is distinctly materialistic in its character. It may, of course, be objected that that is the sort of commonplace statement that is made about every age; but no one can seriously deny that materialism is the one outstanding peril at the present moment, and if the Church yields to the demand of such an age, without the most solemn and prayerful inquiry, it takes tremendous risks. It is not easy to pronounce in relation to some questions which here arise,

nor indeed is it necessary for the present purpose to do so ; all that needs to be said is that whatever obscures, imperils, weakens the Spiritual in the Church stands thereby condemned. Is not the question appropriate at the present moment : " What shall it profit the Church, whose mission and witness are spiritual, whose power is spiritual, if it gain the whole world of social, economic and intellectual greatness and lose its own soul ? "

Nor can it be denied that those illustrious men had unbounded faith in Congregationalism. Their aim was to win England both for Christ and Congregationalism, a quite laudable ambition. In saying this it is with no idea of depreciating the efforts which are being made to bring the various Churches nearer together. There may be such a coming together without in any way weakening one's loyalty to one's own denominational position. It is generally admitted that there is among us to-day a distinct weakening of denominational sentiment. It was recently said by one, who has abundant opportunities of judging, that many of our ministers, deacons, and leading Church officials care very little for our " ism." One marked proof of this is our lack of a religious organ for our work. We are the only religious body of any size that is content to be in such a condition. It is alleged by some that our need is met by the two weekly papers already in existence ; but, without in the least depreciating their value, our work, as a great religious body, calls for something more and different. In these days, in particular, when Congregationalism is undergoing considerable change, the need is all the greater, and yet we seem to be content with the situation as it is. If this were due to an increased care and passion for the larger things of the Kingdom, it might give no cause for serious concern, but

no one can honestly say that it is. The weakening of denominational interest coincides, in point of time, with a real weakening of the great spiritualities of religion, and our history shows that it has invariably been so. Those great times of spiritual achievement, like the one with which this book is mainly concerned, were times when people believed in Congregationalism with a faith akin to that with which they believed in the Gospel. There is no room in religion for a faith loosely and lightly held ; to-day it is less so than ever ; and if, as a religious body, we are to make any impression upon the age, we must make it feel that our denominational heritage, which has been bought at a great price, is valued by us as a vital part of our life. Nor, I repeat, does this loyalty to our own Denomination carry with it the suggestion of indifference towards the claims of the larger Church. Whatever the future may bring in the way of Reunion, a strong and living Congregationalism will be all the better to share in it ; and if, meanwhile, we can catch the spirit, faith, enthusiasm and daring of those simple Itinerant preachers of a century ago, Congregationalism to-day, with its larger numbers, its greater command of wealth, its intellectual equipment and its more perfect organization, in spite of the difficulties, which confront it in common with all religious bodies, may again write a great chapter in the religious history of England.

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PRINTED BY  
TURNBULL AND SPEARS,  
EDINBURGH





Nightingale, Benjamin, 1854-1927.

The heroic age of congregationalism / by  
B. Nightingale. -- London : Congregational  
Union of England and Wales, [1921?]

63p. ; 19cm.

Includes index.

1. Congregational churches in England. I.  
Title.

